

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Marsha Blackburn

1952–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
REPUBLICAN FROM TENNESSEE

2003–



Image courtesy of the Member

WITH ONLY FIVE YEARS' EXPERIENCE IN ELECTIVE POLITICS under her belt, Marsha Blackburn ran for the 108th Congress (2003–2005) to “effect a change for her family and fellow Tennesseans” through fiscal and social conservatism.¹ After arriving in Washington, D.C., Congresswoman Blackburn became a Republican Party star and won praise for her conservative voting record.

Marsha Blackburn was born on June 6, 1952, in Laurel, Mississippi. Her father was an oil industry salesman.² She graduated from Northeast Jones High School in Laurel, Mississippi, as an honors student and earned a bachelor of science degree at Mississippi State University in 1973. She married Chuck Blackburn in 1975, and the couple had two children, Mary and Chad. Marsha Blackburn worked as a businesswoman and owned her own marketing company. Heavily involved in Republican politics, she was elected chair of the Williamson County (Tennessee) Republican Party and served in that post from 1989 to 1991. In 1992, as a relative unknown, Blackburn challenged the Democratic incumbent U.S. Representative Bart Gordon. She ran on the issues of a balanced budget amendment and term limits, receiving 40 percent of the vote in a losing effort. From 1995 to 1997, she served as executive director of the Tennessee Film, Entertainment, and Music Commission. Determined to make a difference, Marsha Blackburn continued to run for elective office and was elected a Tennessee state senator in 1998, where she served for four years, eventually rising to the minority whip post. She gained state and national recognition as a leader in a statewide grass-roots campaign to defeat the proposed Tennessee state income tax.

In 2002, Blackburn ran for the congressional seat vacated when Tennessee Representative Ed Bryant campaigned for the U.S. Senate. In the Republican primary for the district including suburbs stretching from Memphis to Nashville, Blackburn faced three Memphis-area politicians: David Kustoff, Brent Taylor, and Mark Norris. Running on a platform that opposed the introduction of state income tax for Tennessee, Blackburn prevailed with 40 percent of the vote. The district had been a safe GOP seat since 1973 and, in the general election, Blackburn easily defeated Democrat Tom Barron with 70 percent of the vote. Pegged as one of the rising Republican stars in the House, Blackburn was re-elected to the 109th Congress (2005–2007) without opposition.³

As a freshman Member of Congress, Blackburn was assigned to three committees: Judiciary, Education and Workforce, and Government Reform. She believed that her appointment on the Government Reform Committee would improve her knowledge of homeland security and benefit her district.⁴ Blackburn served as vice chairman of the Government Reform Subcommittee on Government Efficiency and Financial Management, where she targeted waste, fraud, and abuse in federal government operations. Blackburn also was appointed to the Majority Whip's team in the 108th Congress and was mentioned as a potential Senate candidate to succeed Republican Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, who announced his decision to retire from Congress in 2007.⁵

Upon taking office, Blackburn declared that she wanted to scale back the size of government. During the 108th Congress, she sponsored three bills to require across-the-board spending cuts in the federal budget. She supported the proposed tax relief measures advocated by President George W. Bush. Blackburn also voted along conservative lines for a number of social initiatives: school prayer, capital punishment, a constitutional amendment to protect marriage, and increased restrictions on abortion.⁶ On the constitutional marriage amendment, Blackburn wanted to see marriage defined in conjunction with "faith, family, and freedom."⁷ In the 109th Congress, Blackburn left her previous committee assignments to accept a seat on the prestigious Energy and Commerce Committee.

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, "Marsha Blackburn," <http://bioguide.congress.gov>

NOTES

- 1 "Marsha Blackburn," Associated Press Candidate Biographies, 2002.
- 2 "Members of Congress Remember Their Father," 12 June 2003, Scripps Howard News Service.
- 3 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/index.html>.
- 4 C. Richard Cotton, "Blackburn Chows Down With the Home Folks," 23 January 2003, *The Commercial Appeal*: NE 1.
- 5 "Guide to Congress," 8 September, 2003, *Roll Call*.
- 6 "Guide to Congress."
- 7 Larry Bivins, "Several Tennessee Lawmakers Would Back Gay Marriage Ban," 26 February 2004, *The Tennessean*: 14A.